

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

1. What is Smarter Balanced doing to support states as they implement the Common Core State Standards?

Smarter Balanced is committed to assisting states as they implement the Common Core State Standards. These efforts include:

- Funding membership for Governing States in the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Implementing the Common Core Standards (ICCS) state collaborative. Participation in this collaborative provides an opportunity for states to develop plans to assist students and teachers in implementing the Common Core State Standards.
- Participating in collaborative efforts, such as the Math Common Core Coalition, <http://www.nctm.org/standards/mathcommoncore/>, whose members also include: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (AMTE), the Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics (ASSM), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Governors Association (NGA), and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).
- Developing a digital library of formative assessment practices and professional development resources aligned to the CCSS. The library will include examples of instructional best practices at each grade level, strategies for cross-classroom collaboration, and professional development resources related to the assessment system, such as scoring rubrics for performance tasks.

2. How will growth be measured on the Smarter Balanced assessment?

The growth model used currently will continue to be used; this growth model converts scores to growth percentiles. At the consortium level, there is discussion in regards to additional growth measures being used.

3. How will teachers be involved with the Smarter Balanced assessment?

The Consortium is committed to engaging teachers in the design of an assessment system that provides resources and information to improve teaching and learning. Teachers will contribute to the development of assessment items for the Pilot and Field tests. Teams of teachers from each state will evaluate the formative tools and resources that will be available through the assessment system. Smarter Balanced will provide professional development for teams of teachers from member states in using the assessments. Finally, teachers will score parts of the assessments, including extended response and performance tasks.

Frequently Asked Questions

4. How will teachers be selected to participate in the formative assessment training cadres starting in 2012-13?

Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, Smarter Balanced will convene State Leadership Teams charged with recruiting an average of 100 educators per state to form State Networks of Educators. These educator networks will provide feedback on the development of formative assessment resources and professional learning tools. They will also serve as ambassadors to help states engage stakeholders with resources and trainings to understand and interpret assessment results. It is expected that states will work with existing networks for professional development, and will invite the regional representatives of professional organizations to recommend teachers to participate in the sessions. Additional information will be available in early 2013.

5. How will teachers be involved in scoring the Smarter Balanced assessments?

Smarter Balanced is committed to involving teachers throughout the development and implementation of the assessment system. While many assessment components are efficiently scored with computer assistance, teachers will be involved in scoring portions of the summative assessment—including 10 percent of computer-scored, constructed-response items as back reads, and hand-scoring of items that cannot be scored by computer. These scoring activities provide an opportunity to deepen understanding of the Common Core State Standards and assessment practices. Teachers will not score assessments from their state, and those involved in scoring will be compensated through their state's normal procedures.

The optional interim assessments, selected-response and technology-enhanced items will be machine scored. To the extent practicable, constructed-response items will also be scored through automated technologies, and items that cannot be scored by computer will be scored locally. Performance tasks will have some components that are scored by computer and others that require human scoring.

6. Will the Smarter Balanced assessment be different from state-to-state?

The Smarter Balanced assessment will be one deliverable assessment. Each state may have a different vendor to provide the operations of the assessment, but the assessment will be the same across the states.

7. Will the Smarter Balanced assessment be phased in by grade level?

Those grade levels identified to be assessed, grades 3rd-8th and 11th, must be assessed beginning at the same time. Through the No Child Left Behind Waiver, it is required to have the assessment out according to a specific timeline, assessing all grades required.

8. Are there a set of guidelines in place for the development of assessment items for the Smarter Balanced assessment?

Frequently Asked Questions

Yes; Smarter Balanced has developed item and performance task specifications and review guidelines that help writers and reviewers create high-quality items. For more information on the item/task specifications, please visit, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/itemspecs>.

In addition, training presentations and videos for item writers and reviewers are available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/item-writing-and-review/>.

9. Currently, are there sample Smarter Balanced assessment questions available to view? If so, are all depths of knowledge as explained in the Mathematics Content Specifications represented in the examples?

You can view item and performance task specifications at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/itemspecs>. The item and performance task specifications are to provide guidance on how to translate the Smarter Balanced Content Specifications into actual assessment items.

You can also view numerous sample items for both ELA/literacy and Math from this webpage. To view the zip folders which house the sample items, it may be easier to save the folders and then open. There are examples for each grade level, for each claim in the content specification and at multiple depths of knowledge.

10. Will there be a database available with formative assessment items organized by not only grade level but by depth of knowledge as outlined in the Smarter Balanced Math Content Specifications?

It has not been fully determined how the assessment items will be organized.

11. How does computer adaptive testing (CAT) work?

Computer adaptive testing adjusts to a student's ability by basing the difficulty of future questions on previous answers, providing more accurate measurement of student achievement, particularly for high and low-performing students. The Smarter Balanced assessment system capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of computer adaptive testing (CAT) for both the mandatory summative assessment and the optional interim assessments. This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today.

For more information, please visit,

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/computer-adaptive-testing/>

12. Will the out of grade level items given to a student on the Smarter Balanced Assessment be counted towards grade level proficiency?

Frequently Asked Questions

Smarter Balanced will incorporate out-of-grade items to ensure that the assessments provide more detailed information about student performance at the extremes of the achievement continuum. Smarter Balanced member states and work groups are reviewing the draft test blueprint, which will establish the specifications for the summative assessment.

13. Will the Smarter Balanced assessment taken in the eleventh grade be content based on the CCSS through Algebra II? If so, how many times will students get to retake the assessment?

The assessment will cover standards through Algebra II. Smarter Balanced will offer a retake opportunity on the CAT portion of the summative assessment for students who feel their scores are inaccurate or that believe the test was administered under non-standard circumstances.

14. How will proficiency levels be set for the 11th grade assessment?

Smarter Balanced work groups, curriculum specialists, and higher education representatives will collaborate to develop initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs) this summer and fall. In addition to expert judgment from K-12 teachers and higher education faculty, Smarter Balanced will draw upon multiple sources of empirical data to guide the setting of performance standards, including: international and national benchmarks such as PISA, TIMSS, NAEP, SAT and ACT; and information about student performance in high school and subsequent postsecondary success from state-level longitudinal data systems.

15. How will remedial students be successful on the Smarter Balanced assessment?

With the adoption of the CCSS, states are choosing to change instructional strategies in order to prepare students for college or careers. With this change, a change in the assessment to determine student content proficiency must occur. The Smarter Balanced assessment taken in the eleventh grade will be through all conceptual category standards, less the plus (+) standards designated for fourth year math courses. Students will be given at least one retest opportunity in their senior year of high school.

16. How will the Smarter Balanced assessment be accessible for students who need accommodations?

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth toward college and career readiness for students with disabilities and English language learners. Smarter Balanced is developing a common framework to guide policy recommendations about accommodation options that can be provided to groups of students and individuals based on documented needs. To get specific information of accessibility guidelines for the Smarter Balanced assessment, please visit, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/>, and scroll down to the bottom of the page to access several documents.

Frequently Asked Questions

17. Can the Smarter Balanced assessment be retaken at any grade level?

Smarter Balanced will offer a retake opportunity on the CAT portion of the summative assessment for students who feel their scores are inaccurate or that believe the test was administered under non-standard circumstances.

18. How will constructed response items on the Smarter Balanced assessment be graded?

Constructed Response (CR) is a general term for items requiring the student to generate a response as opposed to selecting a response. Both short and extended constructed response items will be used. Short constructed response items may require test-takers to enter a single word, phrase, sentence, number, or set of numbers, whereas extended constructed response items will require more elaborated answers and explanations of reasoning. It is expected that constructed response items will generally be scored by computer, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) models as appropriate, with human backup scoring for validation. While many assessment components can and will be efficiently and effectively scored with computer assistance, teachers will also be involved in the scoring of assessment items.

In mathematics, a specific constructed response item type designated as extended response (ER) will be employed. ER items/tasks will contribute to the performance task component; CR items will contribute to the computer-adaptive component. Therefore, in mathematics a CR is a brief constructed-response item that focuses on a particular skill or concept and will be included in the computer-adaptive component. The length of time these CRs take to administer should typically vary from 1 to 5 minutes. An ER item/task is designed to cover content at a greater depth than a regular CR item. The time allotted to administer ER items/tasks should vary from 5 to 20 minutes.

For more information on the general item specifications for constructed and extended response questions, please visit, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TaskItemSpecifications/ItemSpecifications/GeneralItemSpecifications.pdf>, pp. 27 & 28.

Scoring guidelines for CRs, ERs, and PTs, are discussed more thoroughly in the content-specific item specifications documents; for more information, please visit, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/itemspecs>.

19. How will the addition of performance tasks within the Smarter Balanced assessment change the administration of the test?

Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and activities that are coherently connected to a single theme or scenario. These activities are meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items.

Frequently Asked Questions

Performance tasks in reading, writing, and math will be part of the Smarter Balanced summative, year-end assessment. Performance tasks can also be administered as part of the optional interim assessments throughout the year. The performance tasks will be delivered by computer (but will not be computer adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete. While some performance task products may be scored by computers, it is assumed that much of the student work from performance tasks will require human scoring either centrally or through distributed scoring.

For more information on the Performance Task Specification; please visit,

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TaskItemSpecifications/PerformanceTasks/PerformanceTasksSpecifications.pdf>

Examples of performance tasks in ELA/literacy and mathematics can be found in the item/task specifications: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/itemspecs>.

20. Is there flexibility on when the 11th grade Smarter Balanced assessment can be taken and banked; as in the event of a student who is accelerated and can meet the exit proficiency before the 11th grade?

Smarter Balanced has convened a proficiency-based learning task force to explore the definitions and ultimate implications of proficiency-based learning in the development and implementation of state assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Deputy Paul Leather from New Hampshire serves as the chair of this task force with facilitation and coordination provided by David Ruff from the Great Schools Partnership. The final product of the task force is intended to identify needs for states that have fully implemented or plan to fully implement a proficiency-based learning system.

21. Where can I get more information on the artificial intelligence used in scoring portions of the Smarter Balanced assessment?

Artificial intelligence (AI) scoring is a type of automated scoring procedure in which computer algorithms are used to score response types that are open-ended enough that they cannot be scored by means of simple rules or other deterministic procedures. Contract-14 Item/Task Writing/Review – Pilot includes research on automated scoring technologies to inform the Consortium’s approach for the Pilot Test in early 2013.

For more information, please visit, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TaskItemSpecifications/ItemSpecifications/GeneralItemSpecifications.pdf>, p. 28.